

5/12/2005

May '05 Thoughts

American Sheep Industry delegates recently returned from WDC. They were pleased to hear Dr. Hawks say that the '09 date for mandatory tagging, etc. would not include any species that simply did not have the technology to proceed.

Here it is one year later from my 4 – '04 comments. In some ways it appears that we have not made much progress. Apparently some states have not really started their ear tag pilot projects. We keep getting mixed signals as to how far along we are and what are our priorities. Fortunately, our scrapie program is still moving forward and we know that the USDA indeed has done a lot.

A few months ago (maybe 11-04) after one of our other meetings, the Chairpersons of the different species working groups were to have met in Kansas City to "regroup" with new directives for NAIS. Some of us have not heard any details. I was unable to attend the 4-7-05 Minn. meeting since my son got married that week. In late March '05 I received a new blue leaflet from the USDA office in Colo. The title was "National Animal Health Surveillance System". After looking at the cover and reading further it is obvious that some group certainly does have a new agenda that none of us had been discussing for the past 3 years. A large buffalo photo was positioned to catch our eye. No beef cattle, sheep or goats were to be seen. Inside, for the first time it was brought to our attention that our new network purposes included the social welfare of animal populations, and environmental health. Please refer back to my Apr '04 comments about wildlife animals and birds. Some good intentions are inadvertently going to drive some more smaller auction rings and livestock producers (needed for food and habitat management) out of business. That is not going to help the national economic viability. As many of you are aware, many landowners (especially new ones) are just raising wildlife and selling their livestock. Except for those of us who are really dedicated to both livestock and wildlife, it will be a lot simpler to not have to put up with tagging and computerizing by simply getting out of the livestock business. Yes, it is easy to say "that is just talk and some is expected". But this trend is for real! At earlier meetings we talked about the need to keep sheep & goat producers in business.

Suggested Topics to Discuss 5 -13 -05

1. Hopefully we will be brought up to date on the 'blue buffalo' system. What are the plans of the USDA, Dept of Interior and Homeland Security to 'tag', to monitor, to slaughter and to eradicate transmissible diseases in our wildlife and bird populations? They do fly, move around, get transported, and the meat is eaten. Are hunters' & tourists vehicles & footwear capable of carrying diseases?
2. Will Dr. Irwin have time to give us a report 5 -13 on the recent agro-terrorism meeting?

3. What is the status of the software, hardware system for this massive undertaking? Look at the problems that FAS and NRCS are in now as they have attempted to transfer the EQIP program over to the other agency. "All of our eggs are in one basket. We rely too much on what the computer says. It started out with a simple, workable program, but different departments, advisors, and higher-ups just kept adding on to the program. The USDA staffs in the local offices have to repeat a lot of work. It is going to take several weeks to catch up and they will be behind in the other work that needs to be done now." We all know about the necessity of using computers, but we also read nearly every week about their problems. The "magic, sound – good" 48 hour trace back just might not work all the time which leads me to another concern that has been mentioned before.
4. Has there been any serious planning by practitioners, state and federal agencies, transportation and marketing groups about true health certificates? One person whom I greatly respect said "Health certificates – they are a joke!" Private conversations with state and federal DVM's, the AVMA and some practitioners have all been cut short. "Yes, we are concerned. We are studying that some more." Let us remember that early detection is the first line of defense. That is when the trucks need to be stopped right then, especially if the computer is down. It will do very little good to have a truckload of properly tagged cattle/sheep that are exposed to hoof & mouth travel from TX to CA or a load of ALA steers going to a Kansas feedlot. We are told that the virus is carried by the wind. That truck load could be spreading the disease for hundred of miles before the 48 hour traceback is even started. Has any consideration been given to really train producers, market, feedlot, slaughter house, state and federal field employees on what lesions & symptoms to look for?

Yes, for sure we need to study (right now) what the other nations are doing (as Dr. Gary Smith, Colorado meats department has suggested for source verification). I agree with Dr. Kimberling we need to remain positive and offer solutions as how to correct a problem. But starting a new business without training, sufficient capital & equipment, advise from others with experience, and some trials with your complete business plan has a good chance of failing.

In my opinion, asking questions; seeing if the recommendations and research will actually work at large auction rings, at large order buyers', receiving pens, and on mid-size to large commercial herds; and observing obvious drawbacks will be necessary if this committee is really going to be a working group. All of us are busy with our own family, businesses, and other committees. We do not have time to just give lip-service or to be on a group that is used to just make it look like the livestock producers are being involved. Excuse me for preaching to the choir.

Has any group of all the principals including top USDA officials actually gone to a large ranch, tagged, recorded, unloaded at the market, watched the staff keep up

with the electronic paper work; seen what pen the order buyer puts the animals in that are going to be dropped off in different states, feedlots or ethnic slaughter markets; seen the data recorded so that the DVM can truly inspect the animals for the health certificates; sign the certificates; (the sale would have to be over with before the last animal would be put in his shipping pen unless the DVM was there earlier in the day to look at the numerous pens of livestock;) observed the mad rush to get the trucks up to the loading chute; it is late in the night as they are loaded. Who pays the auction ring, order buyers, feedlot and, slaughter house for all of this on a weekly basis? The USDA budget should pay for most of the equipment but the producer will still have to pay a larger commission. Again possibly more producers out of the livestock business!

5. Not much has been said in our group lately about the confidentially issue. It is still a concern for many groups of producers. Was it WY that passed a state law saying the federal government must pass a law respecting that issue before WY will give their data over? It appears to me that we are being put on the back burner on this issue. Is there really any confidentially with federal data with so many agencies being involved including social welfare and the environment. Some of these major issues should be resolved before we continue getting in deeper and deeper with a project that we may not be able to change later. We all have heard; "We are working on it."
6. Who is going pay for the ear tags & extra equipment for markets, trucks, feedlots & slaughter houses? **Sheep and goats are definitely different from cattle.** Many of us run cattle in our multi-species operations so we are not anti cattle. The next ¶ was written for an Angora goat advertisement in an effort to appeal to new land owners and the wildlife segment. It is a point that we should consider making over & over to the various state & federal agencies, our Congressman & their aides and to other animal/bird groups.

"Goats and Sheep, when grazed properly, are environmentally friendly and needed in many areas of our nation to help control excessive brush and numerous weeds. Different species may work better in certain climates, but their grazing habits can result in the use of less chemicals, reduce fire potential, an improved water cycle and a broader use of a more productive land."

Other points for us to show differences.

- a) 5 to 7 sheep or goats (S & G) equal 1 cow but tags will cost the same per ear.
- b) S & G's raise a lot of twins and triplets.
- c) We seldom get back carcass data like done with cattle.
- d) Most of domestic S & G meat remains in the US - not like high \$ beef markets to Japan and South Korea.
- e) The % of expense to S & G producers will be much greater.
7. Where do we stand on group lots. That is very important for our sheep feedlot industry.

8. Why do we keep seeing news releases on FOX and CNN about the great progress? A mandatory date has now been moved to January '09. As a citizen, it would be easy to think 4 years is a long time to wait. Suggestions to the news release staffs: Do more detailed homework before writing up incomplete releases. Let us get more of the big picture planned and tested before fancy phrases are used.
9. Let us hear from Charlie Christensen who serves on the other I.D committees and who is general manager of John Cargile's Producers Auction in San Angelo, TX where some of the cattle, sheep and goat pilot testing will be done.

Thanks,

Joe David